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Special Anniversary Issue

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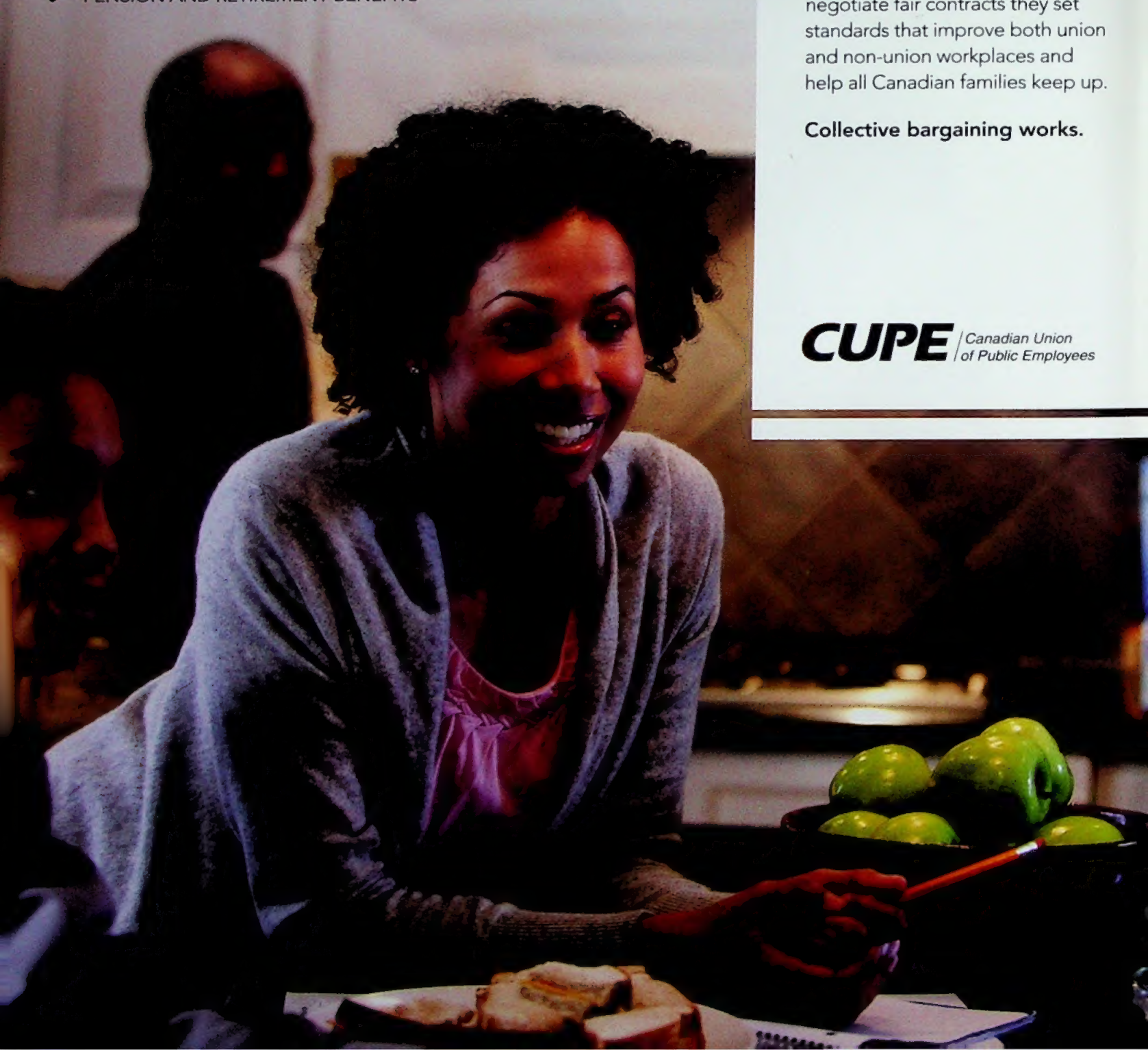
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Briarpatch publishes six thought-provoking, fire-breathing, riot-inciting issues a year. Fiercely independent and frequently irreverent, *Briarpatch* delves into today's most pressing issues from a radical, grassroots perspective, aiming always to challenge and inspire its readers.

Opinions expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the *Briarpatch* board or staff. *Briarpatch* is a member of Magazines Canada and the staff are members of RWDSU Local 568. In order to find new subscribers, we occasionally exchange mailing lists with like-minded organizations for one-time mailings. If you prefer not to receive such mailings, please write to us at the above address. We encourage you to reproduce material from the magazine for educational, non-profit purposes.

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briarpatch

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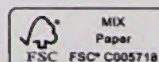
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leading with the heart

The first issue of *Notes from the Briar Patch* rolled off a Gestetner in the summer of 1973 in Saskatoon. According to founder Maria Fisher, the 10-page newsletter was to be “by and for poor people so that we could tell our own story,” and the logo, four stick figures with outstretched arms made from typewritten asterisks, meant “in unity, there is strength and support.”

After two years of failed attempts to secure funding, Fisher and co-founders David Hoskings and Vivian Fisher “just decided to do it,” disseminating 500 copies in social services offices and legal aid clinics across Saskatchewan.

Fisher, who passed on five years ago in Ladysmith, B.C., recalled that after the first issue, “donations of dollars and fivers came in, a unionist came with a handful of stamps, letters with some quarters taped to them arrived, while other people donated packages of Gestetner paper.” From this scrappy beginning emerged a magazine dedicated to those whose words were silenced (or at best, butchered) by the mainstream press, a grassroots outlet through which people could build their shared capacity to understand and influence the circumstances of their lives. While at best, mainstream journalism discusses what people do in society, the ‘patch has always looked to what society does to people, and why. It was, and remains, grounded in the convictions that everyone could (and should) be a writer and that the magazine belongs to the movement.

In 1975, *Briarpatch* moved to a dirt-floored basement office in Regina and has remained a resource-starved publication staffed by self-taught professionals in thrift, dipping into the red and back to the black again. That the magazine has been denied both provincial and federal grants and stripped of charitable status for fierce adherence to its principles is a point of modest pride. What stands is a magazine beholden only to its readers and comfortable in its intransigence.

Briarpatch has always been a labour of love, the key to its unlikely success, as past editor Dave Mitchell notes. “It consistently leads with the heart, and so it’s able to produce quality journalism with a tragic fraction of the masthead depth of most publications.” For forty years readers have consistently and creatively risen to its defence, often lending their scarce funds, but even more often and importantly, their time, tenacity, and passion.

In putting together this issue, what began as a dabbling in back issues soon gave way to a deeply humbling page-by-page combing of the archives. The yellowed newsprint of our first decades chronicles the early advances of neoliberalism in

Saskatchewan, from experiments in strikebreaking legislation to prying open the North for uranium development. But also documented is an era when radical politics thrived: in rural communities fighting to defend the Crow Rate, in Indigenous communities organizing to protect children from state apprehension, and in extensive networks of solidarity with Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Palestine, and South Africa.

As the magazine shifted to a national focus and readership, it continued to be read by radical agrarians and pensioners in Abernethy or Elbow, SK, while proving invaluable to an increasing number of readers at the centre of radical movements in Montreal or Vancouver. For a small radical publication to not just survive but thrive in a climate increasingly hostile to print media and (more pressingly) the political left, is no minor feat. *Briarpatch* has kept the candle burning in dark times, incubating ideas and providing a point of connection to radical organizing and analysis.

When asked what’s kept the magazine going for the past four decades, Clare Powell, *Briarpatch* editor from 1979-1982, replied that “it’s never just the people in the office.” This issue of *Briarpatch* is dedicated to the hundreds of people – subscribers and sustainers, writers, photographers, and artists, board members and volunteers, casual and long-time donors alike – who have carried this little magazine on their shoulders and made this anniversary possible. You who continue to remind us that nothing is more valuable than what’s given freely.

To our army of supporters, we offer our most heartfelt gratitude for all that you’ve given of yourselves over four decades. And to Maria Fisher – we hope to do you right for another 40.

VALERIE ZINK, EDITOR/PUBLISHER
valerie@briarpatchmagazine.com

announcement

With this issue we welcome Andrew Loewen to the fold as co-editor/publisher/pilot. A long-time social activist and one-time English instructor and academic, he has a master’s degree and some questionable poetry stored alongside his old tree-planting gear. We’re thrilled to have snagged his enthusiasm, experience, and dedication to radical politics and the written word, which will undoubtedly serve the ‘patch well. Also joining us is Leslie-Ann Kroeker, a recent journalism school graduate and avid reader, runner, and Netflix junkie with a knack for publishing. On behalf of the *Briarpatch* community, welcome on board!

Joe Catron is a U.S. activist and writer based in Gaza, Palestine, with a background in American antiwar, environmental, labour, and tenant campaigns. He works with Palestinian groups and international solidarity networks, particularly in support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) and prisoners' movements. He blogs at joecatron.wordpress.com and tweets at [@jncatron](https://twitter.com/jncatron).

Nigel Hood is an illustrator and designer living in Edmonton with his wife and son. His son only helps with some of the drawings.

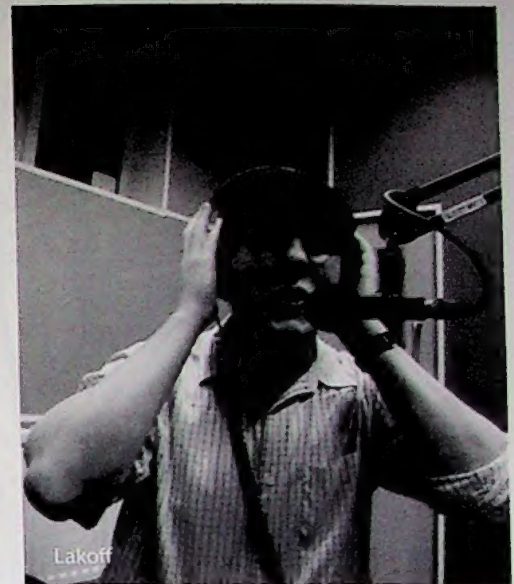
Aaron Lakoff is a DJ, community organizer, and independent journalist who is attempting to map the constellations between reggae, soul music, and a world without bosses or borders. He is a long-time member of the CKUT community radio news collective, and has reported from Palestine, Haiti, Mexico, and across occupied Turtle Island.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is of Mississauga Nishnaabeg ancestry and is the author of *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. She is the editor of *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence and Protection of Indigenous Nations* and *This is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades*, all published by Arbeiter Ring Publishing in Winnipeg.

Shantala Robinson lives and works in New Westminster, B.C. She loves travelling, running, and petting animals. But mostly, she loves to draw and paint. She has worked for numerous magazines and design companies.

Amanda Strong is a Toronto-based artist with a keen interest in combining illustration, photography, filmmaking, and the web. She was the imagineNATIVE/LIFT Mentorship recipient in 2009 for her experimental short, *Honey for Sale*.

Chelsea Vowel is Métis from the Plains Cree-speaking community of Lac Ste. Anne, Alta. Mother to four girls, she has a B.Ed. and a bachelor of law and currently lives in Montreal. She teaches Inuit youth under child protection and blogs as *âpihtawikosisân*. Passionate about law, culture, and language, she tries to deconstruct harmful myths with the hope that there can be a restructuring and renewal of the relationship between Canadians and Indigenous peoples.





POLITICS BASED ON JUSTICE, DIPLOMACY BASED ON LOVE

In traditional Indigenous diplomacy, treaties are not about the cession of land but rather a commitment to stand with one another, a responsibility to take care of shared lands, and an appreciation of one another's well-being. What do Indigenous diplomatic traditions have to teach us about transforming the relationship between Indigenous nations and Canada?

By Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

Illustration by Amanda Strong

A few months ago, I travelled from Mississauga, Anishinaabeg territory on the north shore of Lake Ontario, to Victoria, B.C., to speak in the Indigenous governance program's lecture series. Before I left, I consulted with an Elder to remind myself of the protocols and diplomatic traditions we carry with us when visiting another nation. I wanted to make sure that I was respectful of both my Ancestors and of the Peoples whose homelands I was visiting.

Doug Williams from Curve Lake First Nation always makes time to meet with me and answer my questions. He reminded me to acknowledge the territory I was visiting directly after I had shared with the audience my clan affiliation, where I was from, and my name. We talked about how as a visitor in another's territory, my primary responsibility would be to listen and to take direction from my gracious hosts. We talked about our protocols and processes of engagement that foster and maintain good relationships between our nation and neighbouring nations. We talked about how even though I am not a political leader, I carry those responsibilities no matter where I go. Off I went to Victoria.

I spoke in the First Peoples House at the University of Victoria, a beautiful building designed in the Coast Salish style. At the end of my talk, after having acknowledged that I was in the territories of the WSÀNÈC and the Lekwungen nations, a WSÀNÈC student came over and thanked me for that recognition. Although he couldn't understand exactly what I said in my language, he heard the word "WSÀNÈC" and recognized my engagement with the protocols and philosophies of Anishinaabeg diplomacy. He was appreciative that I had invoked Indigenous political protocols of engagement even though our two nations have no formal diplomatic ties.

Had I been moving to Victoria, this kind of diplomacy would have carried even greater responsibilities. According to my own traditions, I would have a responsibility to listen, to learn, and to appreciate the jurisdiction, political culture, and traditions of the nation within which I was residing. I would have a responsibility to understand the issues this nation was facing, and I would have an obligation to support them and to stand with them. I would have a sacred duty to learn about my place and role within their political structure and their culture, and I would expect the same if one of their citizens moved to my territory.

A few weeks later, in the same room I spoke in at the University of Victoria, local Idle No More organizers held a teach-in. It was broadcast online and attracted over 1,000 people between the webcast and the live audience. Wab Kinew, a well-known Anishinaabe from the northwestern part of our nation, was one of the speakers. During his presentation he passed out gifts to the other panelists. Watching online, I smiled as he did this. Kinew was invoking the protocols of Anishinaabeg engagement. He was pointing to ancient traditions and acknowledging their importance and their relevance in contemporary society. He was honouring his hosts and fellow panelists.

Drawing on diplomatic traditions

Idle No More is the most recent surge in Indigenous resistance, a resistance that has been ongoing since the beginning of colonial conquest. Throughout history, Indigenous Peoples have continuously engaged in diplomatic traditions to seek restitution from the Crown for the abuses suffered under colonial rule and to forge a new, peaceful relationship. Each nation has its own spiritual and political mechanisms, rooted in its own unique legal system, for maintaining the boundaries of

territory, for immigration and citizenship, and for developing and maintaining relationships with other nations regarding territory, the protection of shared lands, economy, and well-being, among many other things. Indigenous diplomatic traditions generate peace by rebalancing conflict between parties. Spiritual and social practices such as storytelling, the

Treaties are alliances with a commitment to continual renewal. They are a commitment to stand with each other, a responsibility to take care of shared lands, and an appreciation of each other's well-being.

oral tradition, ceremonies, feasting, and gift-giving are designed to bond people together toward a common understanding. Our diplomacy concerns itself with reconciliation, restitution, mediation, negotiation, and maintaining sacred and political alliances between peoples.

The Idle No More movement has referenced these diplomatic traditions repeatedly in both our actions and our words. In early December, the media showed images of Wiindawtegowinini (Isadore Day), chief of Serpent River First Nation, carrying the 1764 Treaty of Niagara Covenant Chain Wampum Belt onto Parliament Hill. The Onondaga nation and its Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign brought a large replica of the Two Row Wampum into the city streets, and countless grassroots leaders have talked about the importance of honouring treaties as a way of transforming the relationships between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state.

On the West Coast in mid-February, hereditary Chief Beau Dick of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation walked from his homeland to the legislature in Victoria to perform a ceremony that involved breaking copper. To the Kwakwaka'wakw people, copper is a symbol of justice, truth, and balance, and to break copper in ceremony communicates a threat, an insult, or a challenge. Chief Dick and his supporters performed the ceremony on the lawn of the legislature because they want to change the political relationship they have with Canada – like their Ancestors, they are demanding a relationship based on justice, truth, balance, and protection of their homeland, the environment, and their way of life.

A sacred bond

Going to public school in the 1980s in rural southern Ontario, I learned nothing about Indigenous diplomacy. My experience is by no means unique. Unless Canadians have taken it upon themselves to seek out Indigenous political traditions, they likely have encountered few opportunities to

learn about Indigenous diplomacy and our legal and political perspectives – yet it is precisely these concepts that hold the most promise for resetting the relationship with Canada.

For us in the Mississauga part of the Anishinaabeg nation, treaties are ongoing relationships. The word *relationship* is paramount here. Anishinaabeg political and philosophical traditions emphasize good relationships – with the natural world and with neighbouring nations – as the basis of good governance and a good life. For Anishinaabeg, signing a treaty means a commitment to ongoing meaningful negotiations. It means a political relationship that recognizes and respects parties' nationhoods, legal traditions, and sovereignties. This is true whether the agreement is between the Anishinaabeg and the natural world, another Indigenous nation or confederacy, or a nation-state.

Treaties, from this perspective, are alliances with a commitment to continual renewal. Our politics are embedded within our spirituality, making treaties a shared, sacred bond between peoples. They are a commitment to stand with each other, a responsibility to take care of shared lands, and an appreciation of each other's well-being. They are based on a profound mutual respect, and they are meant to be transformative. They transform conflict into peace by holding parties accountable for past injustices. They transform hardship into sustenance. They transform abuse of power into balanced relations. Treaties and other Indigenous diplomatic traditions transform differing perspectives into, as the Haudenosaunee say, "one mind."

While Canada continues to engage in narrowly defined "modern treaty making" through processes like the B.C. Treaty Process and the federal Comprehensive Land Claims Agreements that require Indigenous nations to give up title and terminate many of their rights, Indigenous nations are moving forward with the resurgence of their own diplomatic traditions.

In 2011, a small delegation of people from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) First Nation in northwestern Ontario travelled to Ardoch Algonquin First Nation (AAFN) in central Ontario to receive a Wampum Belt, or treaty, made by the women of AAFN. The bond between the two communities goes back to 2008 when members of the KI council were jailed for refusing to allow mining exploration in their territory. At the same time, Ardoch community member Bob Lovelace was also jailed for his role in resisting uranium prospecting in Ardoch territory. Paula Sherman, a family head on the traditional governing council of the AAFN, said at the ceremony: "As we present this belt, we pledge the support of our community to yours as you continue to deal with mining companies and governments." Cecelia Begg, a member of the KI council and also a member of

the K1 Six who were jailed in 2008, accepted the belt on behalf of her community, saying, "We thank you for this. It marks our strong bond, a bond we may need to call upon as we face another struggle."

Even in a modern context, treaties are a storied political relationship, consolidating sacred bonds between peoples. They are not about the cession of land or the surrender of Aboriginal title, nor do they assimilate Indigenous law into Canadian law. They are not a bill of sale. They are not a policy discussion. Whether the treaty-making process is historic or contemporary, treaties are not termination agreements.

Separate sovereignties on a shared territory

There is much evidence both in the oral tradition and in the historical record that, over time, Canada engaged in a treaty-making process that was increasingly based on coercion, deception, and violence. The Cree signed Treaty 6 while facing starvation from the massacre of the buffalo, a smallpox epidemic, and increasing settler violence. The final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples documents several examples of misunderstandings, problems in translation, and acts of fraud on the part of the state. Although the numbered treaties were negotiated in the oral tradition of Indigenous diplomacy, the Crown failed to record Indigenous perspectives on these agreements. They did not implement what they agreed to within their own legal traditions and written documents, let alone Indigenous oral understandings.

So yes, the treaty-making process in Canada was fraught with duress. Yet, even as the political power was shifting in favour of settler governments during the signing of the numbered treaties, Indigenous leaders continued to exercise agency within the process. The negotiations for Treaty 3 were extremely difficult, and the Crown ended up making several concessions to the Anishinaabeg. Treaty 7 was negotiated under the reality that the Blackfoot Confederacy had been successful in defending their territory from outside encroachment. Indigenous Peoples still believe in the strength of their oral understandings of these agreements because, even under the threat of violence, our Ancestors made intelligent and far-reaching decisions as best they could.

Instead of interacting with First Nations through these negotiated international agreements, successive Canadian governments have chosen to interact with First Nations through the Indian Act. This continues to be a crucial mistake. Many of us believe Indigenous diplomacy is the best way forward in developing a just and fair relationship with the Canadian state, because this kind of diplomacy carries within it the terms for a nation-to-nation relationship that is respectful of separate sovereignties and nationhoods over a shared territory.

Oftentimes, divisions between Indigenous nations that signed historic treaties and nations that did not are amplified in the mainstream media. It's an arbitrary division because treaties are simply the embodiment of a much larger set of politics and philosophies rooted in each nation's system of international law, peacemaking, conflict resolution, and negotiation. The fundamental principles of protection of land and Indigenous ways of life, governance, nationhood, sovereignty, sharing, and non-interference remain consistent whether manifested in Mi'kmaq law or Gitksan Witsuwit'en law and regardless of whether Indigenous nations signed treaties or not.

We are all treaty people

When I asked my Elder about how to behave in another nation's territory, he reminded me that it is individuals who carry political responsibilities within them. Indigenous diplomacy is not so much about dialogue, but about action and embodiment. Treaties are not just between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state; they are carried and acted out through the actions of individual people. In December of last year, Idle No More organizers in Toronto organized a large round dance in the intersection of Yonge and Dundas. During the round dance, I saw a non-Native man with a sign that read, "We are all Treaty People." Under that, he had written the treaties that he was a part of, based on where he

Many of us believe Indigenous diplomacy is the best way forward in developing a just and fair relationship with the Canadian state.

was currently living and where he grew up. He was reminding his fellow Canadians that they have enjoyed treaty rights for hundreds of years, and that they also need to uphold their treaty responsibilities.

Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred notes that Idle No More has demonstrated that many Canadians are supportive of a principled movement led by Indigenous Peoples that addresses the protection of the land and the environmental, social, economic, and political issues facing Indigenous communities. If the resurgence of Indigenous political traditions is widely seen as the next step in decolonizing our relationship with Canada, it is critical that we understand and recognize the contemporary resilience and manifestations of Indigenous diplomacy. This kind of peacemaking is diplomacy based on love – the love of land and the love of our people – and this alone has the power to transform Indigenous-state relations into a relationship based on justice, respect, and responsibility. ⑥



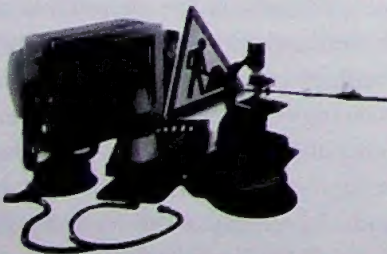
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Organizing for Gaza's Land and Sea

Gaza's farmers and fishers are on the front lines of a military occupation intended to force them from their land and seaways. The Union of Agricultural Work Committees is organizing Palestinian farmers and fishers to support their efforts to remain on the land and sustain an independent agricultural economy. With the help of a growing international boycott against Israel, their strength is growing.

By Joe Catron

Photos by Desde Palestina

“Both of the fishermen captured today have returned to their homes,” explains Zakaria Baker in his home in Gaza’s crowded al-Shati refugee camp the night of February 20.

Baker, an activist with the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), oversees the organization’s committees of fishers in five cities in the Gaza Strip.

“Their boat is in Ashdod, and the Israelis shot the motor,” he adds.

Three days later, the two fishers recount their experience in the sandy courtyard of their family’s home in the northern town of Jabalia. They are surrounded by a dozen relatives, with a similar number of children clustered outside an iron gate.

“Suddenly the Israeli navy came with two small ships, with between five and seven soldiers per boat,” says Mohammed Shehda Sadalla.

“The captain of one of the boats ordered us to drop our nets and swim to the navy ships. We protested, telling them that we were in Palestinian waters. They said, ‘Shut up or we will shoot you.’ We didn’t follow his orders but went to the engine and turned it on. Then one of the soldiers shot it.”

Facing lethal violence, Mohammed and his younger cousin Mahmoud Moussa Sadalla followed the soldiers’ orders,

removing their clothes and swimming through the cold sea to the naval vessel. Once on board, Mohammed says, they were blindfolded and shackled, then transferred to a larger ship that took them to the Israeli port of Ashdod.

After medical testing, soldiers drove them to the Erez checkpoint where they were questioned about their work, their neighbourhoods, and the Gaza seaport. “They took our names, ages,

and addresses. Then they showed us an exact picture of the roof of our home on a computer.”

The interrogators tried to recruit them as collaborators. “They asked us about our economic situation and how much we earned per day and if we could help each other,” says Mohammed. He and Mahmoud were released through the checkpoint into the Gaza Strip later that evening.



Palestinian farmers plant olive trees inside the “buffer zone” in the Zaytoun area during an international day of action on February 9 to call for a boycott of Israeli agricultural products.

The Gaza Strip, a coastal stretch of 360 square kilometres, sits at the crossroads of Africa and Asia. One of the world's most densely populated territories, it contains 1.7 million people, two-thirds of them refugees driven from their homes in Palestine by Zionist militias, and later the Israeli army, during the State of Israel's 1948 founding. It shares a narrow southwestern border with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and is

Previously it had banned Palestinians from coming within 150 metres of the barrier separating the Gaza Strip and Israel or sailing more than six nautical miles offshore. By 2008, the buffer zone had grown to encompass a 300-metre-wide strip of land around the territory and all but three nautical miles offshore.

These areas included over 35 per cent of the Gaza Strip's agricultural land and,

training programs to build their capacity: leadership, teamwork, need assessment, gender, advocacy and community mobilization, organizing syndicates, documenting Israeli attacks, and food sovereignty. UAWC insists on these bodies being strong." In addition to its organizing work, UAWC supports farmers and fishers with projects like home gardens, water carriers, and aquaculture programs.

Despite UAWC's efforts, Israel's restrictions have taken a heavy toll. Between 2007 and 2009, the Gaza Strip's agricultural workforce fell by 42 per cent even as food insecurity had reached 61 per cent of the population. By November 2011, the Gaza Strip held only 3,097 registered fishers, down from about 10,000 in 2000.

A one-sided ceasefire

On November 14, 2012, Israeli forces used an aerial drone to assassinate Ahmed al-Jabari, Gaza Strip commander of Hamas' Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Eight days of Israeli airstrikes and drone bombings, artillery fire, and naval shelling, answered with rocket fire by resistance groups in the Gaza Strip and mass demonstrations in the West Bank, followed. By

November 21, when a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian resistance group Hamas took hold, six Israelis and 186 Palestinians – including two in the West Bank – had been killed.

The first line of the Egypt-brokered deal read: "Israel shall stop all hostilities in the Gaza Strip land sea and air, including incursions and targeting of individuals." The text went on to promise Israel's "refraining from restricting residents' free movements and targeting residents in border areas." The next day, the Palestinian government in Gaza announced that the fishing limit had returned to six nautical miles, and farmers began cautiously exploring the 300-metre buffer zone.

"After the ceasefire, the local government told farmers that their land was



Palestinian boats in the Gaza City port. Fishers are currently allowed to travel only three nautical miles from shore.

surrounded on every other side by Israel or the Mediterranean Sea, which is constantly patrolled by the Israeli navy.

Israel has occupied the strip since 1967, but dismantled its settlements in Gaza and redeployed its ground forces in 2005. However, it kept control of the territory's borders, seaways, and airspace, as well as its banking and telecommunications systems, its imports and exports, population registry, and even the issuance of building permits to international organizations. In 2007, Israel imposed a crippling siege. In addition to a nautical blockade, it sharply reduced the goods allowed through checkpoints under its control, ending nearly all agricultural exports from the Gaza Strip.

It also reasserted its buffer zone policy, typically enforced with live gunfire.

many say, all of its fisheries. "From zero to eight miles there are no fish," says Mohammed al-Bakri, general manager of UAWC in the Gaza Strip.

UAWC, founded in Jerusalem in 1986, organizes farmers and fishers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank into agricultural and fishing committees. "We have 16 local committees for farmers," says Sa'd Eddin Sha'ban Ziada, who coordinates the UAWC's agricultural committees in Gaza. "We have another five for fishermen."

Altogether, al-Bakri says, the Gaza Strip committees include 5,125 farmers, fishers, and other agricultural workers.

"We need strong local committees that can represent their societies," says Ziada. "We support them through several



A path leads to the buffer zone in Khuza'a.

open," says al-Bakri. "After they had cultivated it, Israeli bulldozers entered and destroyed it."

As for fishers, Baker says they had even less of a reprieve. "In the three days after the ceasefire, four small boats with engines and one trawler were captured. One small boat was bombed and destroyed. The motors of two others were shot.

"Since November 24, five boats have been captured, five have been shot, and three fishermen have been injured."

The experiences of these farmers and fishers reflect those of Gaza Strip residents as a whole. In the three months following the ceasefire, British journalist Ben White found that Israeli military attacks killed four Palestinians and wounded 91. Israeli forces launched 63 shooting attacks on the Gaza Strip and 13 military incursions into its land, as well as 30 naval attacks on fishers.

Meanwhile, Palestinian resistance groups kept their part of the deal, to "stop all hostilities from the Gaza Strip against Israel, including rocket attacks and all attacks along the border." Aside from two mortars launched from the Gaza Strip after Israeli attacks in December, the ceasefire held – if only one way – until the morning of February 26, when Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired a rocket into Israel in what the group called a "preliminary response" to the death of its member Arafat Jaradat, allegedly under torture, in Israel's Megiddo prison three days earlier.

Fishers say most attacks on them since the ceasefire have occurred within six nautical miles of the shore. But according to al-Bakri, the new limits remain insufficient. "After the ceasefire, they only opened the sea three more miles," he says. "There are no fish in these three

miles. It is the same. They just wanted to show the international community Israel giving something to the Palestinians. The

In the Gaza Strip, farmers often plant crops according to their distance from Israel's concrete walls and sniper towers: those requiring the least attention are planted closest.

situation is the same; the market is the same. Nothing has changed in the life of the fishermen."



An Israeli tank patrols the fence in the Khuza'a area of the Gaza Strip. Since the ceasefire agreement in November, more than 80 people have been injured by Israeli attacks on agricultural land near the fence or at sea.



A group of Palestinians walks along the beach near the port in Gaza City.

"We don't wait for Israeli decisions about this area. We support the farmers who are going to the buffer zone to exercise their rights to use it."

This depends on how much water the crops need. We don't have to take care of wheat or potatoes every day. And their harvest only takes a day or two. We risk our lives to grow these crops to gain any possible profit."

El-Rahel's rented 1.2-hectare farm lies 400 metres from the separation barrier – not far enough, he says, to save the expensive plastic sheets used to cover rows of strawberries at night from being shredded by bullets during the November attacks. And because he was unable to remove the sheets over eight days, about 80 per cent of the harvest was destroyed. "This wasn't only for me but for all the strawberry farmers in the area."

"We need a clear decision from the international community," says al-Bakri. "Most of them talk about development programs for the buffer zone." In the West Bank, UAWC organizes farmers into agricultural co-operatives to distribute their products effectively. But in the Gaza Strip, Israel's siege has all but eliminated agricultural exports. Through its partnerships with 16 international non-governmental organizations, UAWC has launched new projects to help local farmers remain on their lands.

Near the buffer zone, al-Bakri says, many donors see these as poor investments, a perception Israel does little to discourage. "Representatives from several European countries went to the buffer zone a few weeks ago to inspect a site where they wanted to implement a project," he says. "Israeli troops shot at them to scare them away and discourage them from developing any new infrastructure here."

On March 21, the Israel Defense Forces spokesperson announced that the fishing limit would again be reduced to three nautical miles.

Farmers, he says, face small improvements for certain crops. "Some of them plant wheat close to the buffer zone. They're afraid they won't be able to cultivate it."

In the Gaza Strip, farmers often plant crops according to their distance from Israel's concrete walls and sniper towers: those requiring the least attention are planted closest. "From 50 to 150 metres, we can grow wheat," says Ammar Saleh el-Rahel, a strawberry farmer in Beit Lahia. "After 150 metres, we can grow potatoes."

In the short term, he adds, "we don't wait for Israeli decisions about this area. We support the farmers who are going to the buffer zone to exercise their rights to use it. We know that the Israeli bulldozers may come later and destroy it. But we have to say to the international community, 'These are our rights. This is our land.'"

Boycotts are working

It is because of the uncertainty, Ziada says, that UAWC emphasizes political engagement. "We seek to push for farmers and fishermen to have a say and voice their opinions."

He recites events for which the local committees have mobilized hundreds of participants: Prisoners' Day, Nakba Day, Land Day, Labour Day, a festival supporting Gaza's Samouni family (which lost 21 relatives to Israeli attacks in January 2009), a rally for fishers in the seaport, and a protest of the Palmer Report, which denied Israeli guilt for its attack on the 2010 Freedom Flotilla.

For its most recent demonstrations, UAWC joined protesters in the West Bank and 40 European cities to support a boycott of Israeli agricultural companies. Gaza events, which lasted several days, ended with a February 9 march, rally, and mass planting of olive trees in the buffer zone. On March 3, several hundred fishers sailed a flotilla of over 50 boats from the Gaza seaport to the northern town of Beit Lahia to protest Israeli naval attacks and confiscation of fishing vessels.

"To make pressure, we need a boycott of the Israelis by the international community," al-Bakri says. "Only this will force them to allow Palestinians to use our lands and waters."

But he thinks international reactions show UAWC's mobilizations are working. "When I receive phone calls from Belgium, Norway, Italy, and England ... it means our voice is raised and people know the issues." ⑥



Palestinian and international solidarity activists calling for the boycott of Israeli products demonstrate inside the buffer zone.

TAKE ACTION!

- 1 . Join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (bdsmovement.net), a global effort led by Palestinian civil society to force Israel to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and to fully comply with the precepts of international law. Participating organizations include: Montreal's Tadamon! (tadamon.ca), Toronto's Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (caiaweb.org), Vancouver's Boycott Israeli Apartheid Campaign (boycottisraeliapartheid.org), the Canada Palestine Association (cpavancouver.org), the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation (endtheoccupation.org), among many others.
- 2 . Educate others using videos (vancouver2gaza.org/2012/08/09/videos-from-the-union-of-agricultural-work-committees-now-online) and other materials (fishingunderfire.blogspot.com/2013/02/new-solidarity-posters-for-gaza.html) produced by UAWC and its supporters.
- 3 . Demand that your elected officials act to stop Israel's attacks on Palestinian farmers and fishers, and end the siege.
- 4 . Buy Palestinian agricultural products (canaanfairtrade.com/our-business-partners.php).
- 5 . Join International Action for Palestine (actionforpalestine.org), the International Solidarity Movement (palsolidarity.org), the Palestine Solidarity Project (palestinesolidarityproject.org), or another solidarity organization that works with Palestinian farmers and fishermen.
- 6 . Donate to support UAWC's work (uawc-pal.org/articleen.aspx?ano=24).



Innu Not Idle as Plan Nord Advances

As Pauline Marois' Parti Québécois tries to repackage the Charest government's neoliberal policies, resistance to the massive Plan Nord project is escalating among the northern Innu people and their allies. Even as band councils enter negotiations with the Canadian government, grassroots activists inspired by Idle No More are fighting for Indigenous autonomy and their traditional territories.

By Aaron Lakoff

Illustrations by Shantala Robinson

One year after the student strikes and Maple Spring that erupted in Quebec in 2012, the ongoing wave of social protests is having to recalibrate itself to meet a new set of challenges.

Former Liberal premier Jean Charest incited popular outrage with a proposed university tuition hike and broader austerity measures, but with last September's election of Parti Québécois (PQ) leader Pauline Marois, many are finding that the neoliberal policies of the Charest government are only taking on slightly subtler forms. In late February, Marois held a two-day summit on post-secondary education and announced that her government would continue to increase tuition costs, much to the chagrin of the student movement.

Also continuing is the northern Quebec development project known as Plan Nord under the previous provincial government and recently rebranded Le Nord Pour Tous under Marois. According to its official website, Plan Nord is a 25-year project estimated to bring in \$80 billion in investments and create 20,000 jobs in mining, forestry, and dam projects. On February 9, 36 people were arrested at protests outside a trade fair on natural resource industries in Montreal, where

demonstrators chanted "Charest, Marois, même combat!" ("Charest, Marois, the same fight!") and decried what they saw as the same colonial development plan with a new name.

Several Innu communities of Nitassinan, the name for the traditional Innu territory of northeastern Quebec and Labrador, have for years been engaged in a heated struggle against Plan Nord. On January 1, Jeannette Pilot, an Innu grandmother

The neoliberal policies of the Charest government are only taking on slightly subtler forms.

and long-time activist for the defence of Nitassinan, began a hunger strike. She was joined by Aniesh Vollant, an Innu youth from the Uashat reserve on the north shore of the St. Lawrence Seaway, in eating only fish broth, a cultural symbol for hardship, sacrifice, and strength for many nations, according to Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson. Their action was directly inspired by Attawapiskat Chief Theresa

Spence and the Idle No More movement. Vollant continued her hunger strike for 43 days, and Pilot, 82 days.

Asked why she decided to take up a hunger strike, Pilot weaves together many different issues of different scopes. Like many in the Idle No More movement, she wants Bill C-45 abolished. But she also wants an end to Plan Nord and an autonomous government for the Innu.

"Right now, Indigenous people all across the country are rising up and demanding that the government recognize their autonomy," says Pilot, her voice noticeably weakened from her hunger strike.

Pilot's struggle began long before Idle No More took off. In 1992 she was arrested for protesting the SM-3 dam near Sept-Îles. In 2012, she marched over 900 kilometres from Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam to Montreal to protest Plan Nord.

The Innu have never signed a treaty with the Canadian or Quebec governments, although one is currently being negotiated with the Innu band councils. Pilot sees the Idle No More movement as a way to open up the dialogue for Innu self-determination, rather than a treaty.

"The Idle No More movement has really touched me personally, and others in

Like many in the Idle No More movement, Jeannette Pilot wants Bill C-45 abolished. But she also wants an end to Plan Nord and an autonomous government for the Innu.

our territory as well. This is why we are demanding self-government," says Pilot. "Now is the time to manage ourselves, to make our own laws, and to cut the ties with the federal and provincial governments."

For Pilot, Plan Nord is a direct threat to Innu culture and way of life.

"We have our medicines up there, our hunting, our animals, our rivers – everything is there for us. What is in the forest is anchored in our souls. If it is destroyed, it will really be a total assimilation for us."

Conflicting expectations

One of the main points of concern for the Innu with Plan Nord is the Romaine River dam project. The Romaine is a 500-kilometre-long river that runs south from the Quebec-Labrador border and empties into the St. Lawrence. The area is home to woodland caribou, black bears, wolverines, and other large mammals. The river, one of the last undammed rivers in Quebec, teems with salmon, eels, and many other species of fish. Hydro-Québec is hoping to complete a series of four large dams along the Romaine by 2020, which would generate a total annual output of eight terawatt hours, or the average energy used by 450,000 Quebec households.

Many Innu activists have protested the Romaine dams not only because of the threat to biodiversity, but also because large swaths of forest will have to be destroyed to make way for the high-tension lines to transport electricity from the dams to consumers in Montreal and other cities.

Gary Sutherland, a spokesperson for Hydro-Québec, says that, despite

opposition, the Crown corporation does try to get the support of Indigenous communities.

"One of the main concerns of Hydro-Québec is that our projects are well received by the local communities. So we work hard with those communities to establish partnership agreements with them," says Sutherland. "We know there are going to be conflicting expectations sometimes. We take the necessary steps to make sure that those host communities, including the Aboriginal communities, are involved both in the development and benefit from the economic spinoffs at all stages of the project."

Hydro-Québec held two referendums in 2011, one in the Uashat reserve and another in Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam, asking if communities would allow transmission lines from the dams to be built across their territory. Neither received majority approval.

"A huge, dirty project"

Chris Scott is a Montreal-based environmental activist with l'Alliance Romaine, a coalition devoted to protecting the Romaine river against Hydro-Québec's dams. Scott has travelled the length of the river on a few occasions to observe the impacts of development now underway.

"It's a huge, dirty project," says Scott. "It will drain the river, flood huge amounts of boreal forest, and force the river out of its normal course into an underground tunnel."

Another point of controversy is the amount of public subsidies going into the development relative to the royalties coming out.

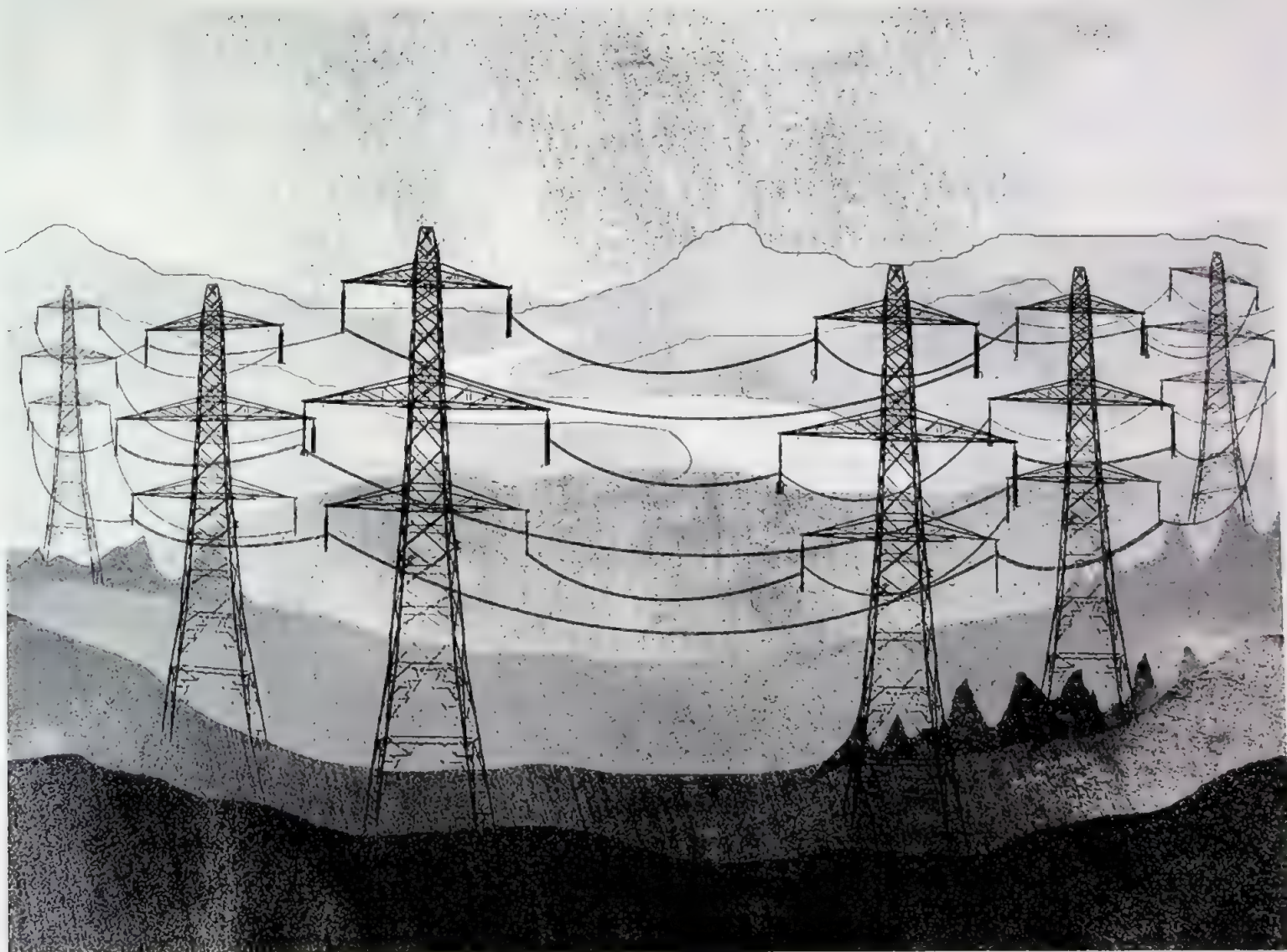
"Previously, under governments like [Maurice] Duplessis, companies would have to pay for their own access to these territories," explains Scott. "They would build their own road, and if the road was clearly serving the company to get into a mining site and take the minerals out, the company would pay for that road. That was the old approach. The new approach says 'we need to encourage these companies to take our minerals for almost nothing.' So they pay very low royalties."

According to Scott, the Quebec government is paying for industrial development roads in the areas around Natashquan and Chibougamau that were previously untouched by large-scale development. He says that the government is also furnishing the electricity that companies need to conduct their mining and smelting operations.

Fighting to be heard

On an official trade mission to New York City in December 2012, Marois reiterated her support for development in Quebec's north but underscored that she wanted to do it differently than her predecessor. In an interview with the business news website Bloomberg.com, she stated that "We [the Quebec government] want to raise more revenues from royalties, but we don't want to kill the industry." The provincial government is hoping to bring in new mining legislation that would set a five per cent minimum royalty on minerals extracted from the ground in addition to a 30 per cent tax on "super profits" from the extraction of non-renewable resources.

Regardless of the amount that mining companies will pay in royalties, or the referendums with Hydro-Québec, the impact



of ongoing mining and dam projects on the land will be severe, according to many Indigenous people and environmental activists. As Scott says, "I've seen month by month, week by week, the deforestation taking place. There will essentially be nothing left of the natural ecosystem when this is finished."

While environmental activists in Montreal are busy strategizing, the Innu in northern Quebec are living the consequences of development that is

pushing ahead unhindered. Few have faith that Marois will offer anything significantly different from Charest in terms of environmental protection.

"Nothing has changed; they just changed the name to make it seem nicer," says Mathieu Morin-Robertson, an Innu man originally from the Lac Saint-Jean area in central Quebec. "The projects are continuing, regardless. Whether it's the Liberals or the PQ, we need to keep fighting to be heard."

For her part, Jeannette Pilot has made it clear that she sees her hunger strike in the context of a larger struggle that extends beyond Native reserves and territories. "We're doing this just as much for non-Native people, because Mother Earth is in danger," she says. "We will continue until the government recognizes that we exist, because right now we are invisible. We don't exist to them. This movement will continue until we win our ancestral rights as Indigenous people." **B**



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The Geography of Briarpatch



By Emily Davidson, with coordinates courtesy of Derek Hogue

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From a four-page newsletter run off a photocopier in Saskatoon in 1973, Briarpatch has grown to a magazine with a community of subscribers in 346 towns and cities across Canada and beyond, from Abbey, SK (pop. 130) to the 10.5-million-strong metropolis of Seoul in South Korea.

LEGEND

- Town or city with a *Briarpatch* subscriber
- Most committed subscribers: Jim & Ellen Loughery in Prince George, B.C., renewed up until 2031
- Longest-running subscriber: Edith Mountjoy in Regina, SK, a subscriber since 1977
- ★ *Briarpatch* Headquarters, Huston House, Regina, SK



A communications specialist and intrepid freelancer, Dave Mitchell worked as Briarpatch editor from 2005 to 2010. In the short time since his retirement from the magazine, Dave has co-edited the book Beautiful Trouble, spent time in Mexico City researching the political uses of the war on drugs, worked as director of communications and policy development for Ryan Meili's recent campaign for leadership of the Saskatchewan NDP, and guest-edited an issue of Briarpatch. In between bouts of hyperactivity, you can find him calmly contemplating Buddhist ethics over a pint of Guinness.



NIGEL HOOD

When I started at *Briarpatch* in 2005, I was 28, over-educated, under-qualified, disenchanted, and suspicious of any organization that had the money to pay a decent wage.

I was, in other words, a perfect (mis)fit for a magazine that was determined to change the world by force of wit, analysis, investigation, edgy design, and sheer tenacity. *Briarpatch* was my dream job, and I threw everything I had into it.

The workload and learning curve were daunting enough that I briefly contemplated setting up a cot in the attic of Huston House, where *Briarpatch* is based, in lieu of renting an apartment — I was at the office most of the time anyway. Fortunately, I eventually found a more sustainable work-life balance as we shifted to a more realistic publishing schedule and found ways to share the workload with some very talented volunteer copy editors and proofreaders.

When I started, the magazine had yet to fully enter the digital age. There was only one computer in the office with access to email and the Internet — it was kept in a corner of the administrative assistant's office, quarantined, for fear of viruses, from the editor's and administrator's i486 computers on which most of the actual work was done.

Briarpatch has always been a labour of love, and I believe that's the key reason for the magazine's unlikely success. It consistently leads with the heart, and so it's able to produce quality journalism with a tragic fraction of the masthead depth of most publications. From the writers and illustrators, to the staff and board, to the subscribers and sustainers, hundreds of people over the years have given their all to produce quality content designed to incite, inspire, provoke, and harangue readers into action for a better world. ⑤

Clare Powell *has clocked more than three decades as an active contributor to Briarpatch, filling almost every role we have, including writer, editor, board member, envelope stuffer, and podcast host. After retiring from a long career in the labour movement in 1999, Clare remains active as an anti-nuclear activist, Briarpatch volunteer, and host of Eclectic Café on CJTR Community Radio 91.3 FM, where he kicks back to the likes of Ella Fitzgerald and Peggy Lee.*



NIGEL HOOD

How did you come to work at *Briarpatch*?

I had been working in radio for about 10 years. I started out in Flin Flon, Man., and went to four different stations in Manitoba before moving to Regina to work for the CBC for a year. I spent a short time working for the provincial government before getting into a dispute with the NDP over their support for nuclear power.

I don't know how long I'd been buying *Briarpatch*, but when I saw that they were looking for an editor, I applied. I think I was the only one.

What did the production process look like in 1979?

Quite different. We had an addressograph, a steel machine that stamped out lead address plates and weighed a ton. We got it over here in the back of a truck and had to set up a pulley system to haul it up the back fire escape with about five guys on the end of a rope. It was immense. We used a typesetting machine and pasted sheets of text and headlines onto each page by hand.

You came on as the editor immediately after the NDP government cut *Briarpatch*'s \$54,000 annual funding, which comprised about two-thirds of the magazine's budget at the time, ostensibly because it had "lost touch with its low-income origins." Presumably, *Briarpatch*'s criticism of the Blakeney government's pursuit of uranium mining and nuclear development, and its cuts to day-care and legal aid, had much to do with it.

We were all onside when it came to opposing the uranium industry. But we also started covering more union issues, and while the NDP was allegedly not anti-union, there were a lot of anti-union people, and they didn't like the emphasis on defending the rights of union members. I suspect that was part of it too.


We had to cut back to a four-page newsletter for one month in September 1980. But we were back full-swing in October. We appealed to our supporters, and money came in. That was the only time that the magazine hasn't published. I don't know, quite frankly, how we managed. One person, Bev Crossman, laid herself off. One thing we did was set up the typesetting company, First Impressions, which brought in quite a bit of revenue for a while. All of us would go out to try to get business. It wasn't easy. We just muddled through.

You didn't skip a beat in taking the Blakeney government to task. You wrote in the first issue after the funding cut was announced that the NDP government was far from its posturing as "champion of the downtrodden and disadvantaged" and that it was content to "patch up and plaster over the most gaping inequalities in the capitalist system."

I was very colourful, yes.

There are two schools of thought. One is that government should be neutral and provide funds for magazines. The other is that if you're reliant on government for funding, chances are that you'll back off from criticism, which we never did, and we paid the price.

You've described *Briarpatch* as a "champagne magazine on a beer budget." An alternative tagline recently suggested by former editor Dave Mitchell was "scraping by since 1973." What do you think has kept *Briarpatch* going for 40 years?

It's never just the people in the office. People used to pop out of nowhere and send us articles ... 90 per cent of them were better writers than I was. They didn't get a penny. We just couldn't afford to pay them. But they just kept coming and coming. Many of these dedicated people are still here in Regina. I've had a lot of disappointments with politicians and other people in my life, but not with *Briarpatch*. 

Shayna Stock is a performance poet, facilitator, and community organizer based in Regina. She worked for Briarpatch for over four years in various capacities, including as publisher, editor of the magazine's sister publication The Sasquatch, and editor/publisher. She now spends most of her time writing and performing poetry, facilitating spoken word workshops, and running Regina's monthly poetry slam Word Up Wednesday. She skis in the winter, goes for long bike rides in the summer, and dances all year 'round.

The following poem was pieced together from snippets of letters to the editor over Briarpatch's 40-year history. Each line is a direct, unedited quote from a Briarpatch reader, with the voices of dozens of readers represented in the whole poem.



NIGEL HOOD

Dear Briarpatch: A break-up letter/love poem

Written by Briarpatch readers

Compiled by Shayna Stock

Hello from Yellowknife (north of 60)

Greetings and solidarity from this little island in the middle of the North Atlantic

I am an old age pensioner with income supplement, residing on my father's original homestead and have a small mixed farm

I am 21 years old, and I work 3 jobs and go to school

I have passed my 82nd birthday

Am over 80

I am 85 years old

I'm 86.

I hear that you had a very restful and relaxing holiday recently in some Caribbean resort

I trust it didn't bother your conscience too much.

I am working my way through the February 1995 issue, and have a minute or two before my 'fav' show, This Hour has 22 Minutes, comes on.

J'ai récemment entendu parler de votre revue (magazine) et il m'intéresse beaucoup

I read in Spanish and French too

I'm mostly a hermit and hardly see anyone

I had a part in the 1945 liberation of Holland

Describe me as a business man

I have a reg. 8-5 job – damn.

I have devoted the last 10 years of my criminal justice work to public education

I'm out of light bulbs – and they nixed my drivers licence a long time ago

I've been obsessed with finishing the first draft of a novel
I tend to take things one at a time
I love happy endings.

I've been feeling rather nauseous lately
I have been sidelined with cancer for some months, but just had the great news that the tumor has shrunk 2/3 so am back in action, thanks to prayer first, and other aids secondly
Guess I'm lucky to be alive and healthy but I'm tired!
I'm running out of steam!

All my credit cards were stolen when I fell asleep in the park walking home from the hospital. I did not renew them. It's about 1 mile and the bus goes only down and up – not across from the hospital.

I'm a widow now
I'm on a small widow's pension
I'm a widow now
Sorry, I repeated.

My bank acct is limited
but I would like to give what I can afford
I am low-income
but I hope to keep up my subscription to Briarpatch
I wish I could afford more
Eyesight and income failing
What I am able to give is but a pittance of the necessary
I do feel guilty that I've sent so very little help.

I should be taken out and whipped for being so remiss in not maintaining communication with you

Shame on me for not responding earlier! I have been so busy...
I know I know I procrastinate

I'm afraid it's a case of putting some things off too long while we focus on the demands of "modern day" living, which seems to consume too much attention

You did or said nothing wrong. I just have little time to read you.

I intended to pay – just ran a little short of cash – it's hard trying to start a new career, even if it is as a professional – in the 80s

Since moving back to Winnipeg last August to go back to college, my partner, baby and I have been living off meagre savings and a disappointingly low student loan

At my age, I am only subscribing a year at a time, but I am enclosing a donation to help keep up the good work

We, Florence and I, send you a hundred bucks to keep on keeping on

We sold some cattle a few weeks ago, and didn't receive too bad a price for them
So thought we would pass some of our good fortune on
I do hope that I can do better next year.

I'm renewing because Briarpatch is an institution, but I don't really enjoy it
I'm afraid around here there isn't much interest in reading Briarpatch
While I appreciate the concerns expressed in Briarpatch, I must admit there are times
that I wonder why I keep investing money in its publication
In general, the articles are extreme left wing. The points many journalists hammer home
is wanting things their own way, bettering a few at the expense of many

Glenn did a good job on the article except – horror of horrors – he referred to us as
social democrats instead of socialists

Some of my friends in Ontario saw and called me “a hard-core activist who appeared in
a famous leftist prairie magazine”

I hope you will forgive me for saying so, but I just don't think your analysis has depth
No Marx perhaps?

It is the most appallingly bad piece of writing that I have seen in some time
A piece of cowardly journalism I never thought I would see in Briarpatch

Perhaps this was a throw-away donation piece, hastily written in between your trips
to the Volvo dealer for new car warranty service, and trips to China to check on your
business ventures

Not only does it contain an inexcusable number of factual errors, it also crushes any hint
of thoughtful analysis under a rant of crude and petty personal insults

I hope that the quality of analysis from the left becomes keener and less pejorative

Hope breeds hope

Even though I've been rather sarcastic in my response to you, I nevertheless do want to
thank you for your article. It prompted me to respond, at least.

You have empowered me to continue to pursue my writing career
Regards to your staff at Briarpatch for thought-provoking journalism
Still think it's the best mag in Canada
Good luck to the joint effort of the 2 young ladies at the helm
More power to your elbow
Thanks.

Anyway, my program's on
Enough babble
I have run off at the mouth for long enough
You probably need to get back to that damn computer, don't you?
How about restoring my interest and confidence?

Sincerely,
Briarpatch Readers

ps. Please move into the 1990s and put Briarpatch on line, set up a web site and get
yourself a private E-mail address.

pps. I'll be in Regina around July 20 for a few days... Would it be possible to meet someone
from Briarpatch for a drink?

Educator and trade union activist Adriane Paavo worked as editor of Briarpatch for three stormy years in the 1980s, during which she fended off the collective wrath of business, government, and mainstream media interests. She now works as an education officer for the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union and also kayaks and quilts. She continues to be a sustaining subscriber and active supporter of Briarpatch.



NIGEL HOOD

Grant Devine's government in the 1980s gave Saskatchewan its first taste of neoliberal casino capitalism. While we may be used to the card tricks by now – deregulation, privatization, tax cuts for businesses and the wealthy, a shrinking of the public sector – today's players are smoother, more polished, and better schooled in how to make their moves without scaring the audience. In the 1980s, things were more flamboyant, more Wild West saloon poker than Monte Carlo baccarat.


Briarpatch worked hard to keep an eye on Devine's hand, right from his election in 1982 through until when I was editor from 1987 through 1989. Two events stand out for me from those days.

In the first, I was heading home in a cab from the Regina airport, in a post-flight daze, when the driver mentioned that he too had just gotten back from a trip. He and some friends had been in Calgary putting together a deal to buy the publicly owned bus company, Saskatchewan Transportation Company. All had strong ties to the provincial Conservative party.

When I and *Briarpatch* volunteer Murray Dobbin started phoning around, saying we were with the party and had some money to invest, we found out a lot more. Fortunately the deal never happened, but it showed how the scent of big, easy money was in the air, and it wasn't just attracting men in suits (see "Mike buys a bus company," *Briarpatch*, March 1989).

The second event involved a group of the province's top business leaders, academics, and lawyers who had formed the Institute for Saskatchewan Enterprise (ISE), a "non-partisan" organization dedicated to "stimulat[ing] public awareness of all aspects of enterprise from an economic, rather than a political, perspective." ISE organized a major international conference to take place in Saskatoon in May 1990, billing it as providing definitive proof of the values of privatization.

Those were the days before the Internet. Using traditional public library reference systems and the help of *Briarpatch* volunteers John Warnock and Cheryl Stadnichuk, I found a trove of information detailing ISE board members' self-interests in privatizing Saskatchewan resources and the track records of many of the conference's experts ("With a little help from their friends," *Briarpatch*, July/August 1989). At the conference, a team of people from the labour movement, *Briarpatch*, and the Action Canada Network spread the information to the media and conference-goers, giving the event a lot more attention than organizers wanted.

Those more innocent days, when the people wanting to gut collective, public mechanisms were honest and open about their greed, are over. Today, the stakes are higher and the players are global. Fortunately, the tools at our disposal to fight back and articulate an alternative are also more sophisticated, with *Briarpatch*, now age 40, among them. 

Phil Johnson is an independent consultant in labour relations and human resources. He has honed his knowledge of Saskatchewan culture and politics through years of living in Aylesbury, Craik, Saskatoon, the Cypress Hills, and now Regina. Phil swims like a fish and has participated in Briarpatch's swim-a-thon for each and every one of its 20 years. He is currently spearheading guerrilla-gardening actions in an unspecified area of the city.



NIGEL HOOD

My relationship with *Briarpatch Magazine* began in the early 1980s when I found a copy of this radical rag on the newsstand in rural Saskatchewan. I've been a subscriber ever since.

Between 1995 and 2010 (with a few years off in the middle), I spent many Sunday mornings and Monday evenings at meetings in drafty union hall basements and at Huston House (also drafty) as a member of the magazine's board of directors. Of course, much of the time during and between board meetings was devoted to generating fundraising and story ideas. This was the fun part. The hard work of making the ideas happen usually fell to our staff, whose devotion to the magazine has always amazed me.

What has always appealed to me about *Briarpatch* is that it tells stories from inside the community. It digs deep and wide, offering perspectives that the corporate media ignore. It allows the people affected by public policy or corporate actions to tell the reader what life is like for them and what they believe needs to be done to get a little justice for themselves and many others like them.

Briarpatch is a far different magazine today than it was 40 years ago, or even 30 years ago when I first picked it up, but it still has that burning drive to uncover injustice and provide a vehicle for getting the truth out. It has expanded the discussion. Although it is no longer the 10-page forum for low-income earners, welfare recipients, and the unemployed that it started out as, these topics are still covered, and the philosophy of siding with the oppressed and impoverished remains. Over the years, there has been more than a little debate over whether *Briarpatch* should focus on Saskatchewan news or evolve into a national magazine, and it now covers local, national, and international issues.

The quality of research, writing, and editing is often superb. Looking at the last few issues, I have to note a couple of articles: "Defining Who is Métis" by Tara Gereaux and "Killers in High Places" by Dave Oswald Mitchell (former *Briarpatch* editor). They exemplify what *Briarpatch* has become. Both discuss timely issues of local, national, and international importance, both are by Saskatchewan writers, and both are thoughtful, thoroughly researched, and superbly written. *Briarpatch* has come a long way indeed, without losing any of its courage or principles. ⑥

Edith Mountjoy was born in a displaced persons' camp in Denmark in 1945. She and her family emigrated from Germany to Canada in 1954. After her mother's early death, she was fortunate to be raised by an intrepid woman, her grandmother, who showed her how to love the natural world and care about social justice. Her involvement with Briarpatch began as a volunteer contributor, and she went on to work as a staff member in the 1970s and again in the 1990s.



NIGEL HOOD

For an independent, Saskatchewan-based magazine to have survived for 40 years is a remarkable achievement. The only explanation for this success is that its founding message – that a better world is possible if we act together to bring it about – has resonated with its many friends and supporters throughout the years.


When *Briarpatch* was founded in 1973 by a group of unemployed people, it was to give a voice to those struggling against poverty, injustice, and oppression, to help fill the gap left by the mainstream media. As founding member Maria Fischer explained in *Briarpatch*'s 15th anniversary issue, the magazine's purpose was to be part of a grassroots movement to challenge a system that preserves privilege and breeds prejudice. When Maria died five years ago at the age of 87 in Ladysmith, B.C., she remained a loyal *Briarpatch* supporter.

In the early days, funding to produce and distribute the magazine around the province was provided through a grant from the provincial government's Department of Social Services. This funding was abruptly cut in 1979. Although the official line justifying the cut was that *Briarpatch* had lost touch with its low-income origins, the real motive, it appeared, was to muzzle the magazine because of its anti-uranium stance. The cut was not only sudden, but also retroactive, leaving the magazine in a precarious position. The *Briarpatch* collective appealed to its community for help with survival strategies. A

Save the *Briarpatch* Support Committee was formed, and the community quickly came to the rescue.

Those were challenging, but also good, times as everyone worked together to stabilize funding. Benefit dances and banquets became a way to not only raise money but to build community and celebrate together for a common cause. A monthly donor program was established, and subscription drives were initiated. *Briarpatch*'s typesetting machine was put to use for contract work. Among the first to come on board was the University of Regina's student newspaper, *The Carillon*, and the Retail and Wholesale Department Store Union's newsletter, *The Defender*. This was the beginning of First Impressions, the typesetting and design arm of *Briarpatch*, formed in 1980 to take on commercial work to subsidize the magazine.

I returned to work at *Briarpatch* in the early '90s when the magazine celebrated its 20th anniversary. By then, due to changing technology, First Impressions no longer existed. What remained was the continuing need to challenge the status quo. That need is even greater today, in a time of global corporate domination and a widening gap between rich and poor.

For 40 years, *Briarpatch* has remained true to its radical roots. It has spoken out strongly and courageously against injustice in all its forms. It has also provided a home for activists working for social change. I feel privileged to have been part of this movement and grateful for the many friends I met along the way. 

June, 1976

34th Edition

BRIAR PATCH

THE VOICE FOR ALL LOW - INCOME PEOPLE.

BRIAR PATCH

50¢

Saskatchewan's Independent Monthly Newsmagazine

Briarpatch

Volume 9, Number 6

July/August 1980

\$1.00

a progressive Canadian newsmagazine

BRIAR PATCH

Volume 29, Number 3

April 2000

\$3.00

briarpatch

FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

BRIAR INDEX

Estimated total donations, 1973-2013: \$1.039 million

Number of Facebook fans in Pakistan: 85

Number of years we've automatically renewed Noam Chomsky's subscription to continue counting him among our subscribers: 7

Number of new Regina residents attributed to *Briarpatch* staff recruitment efforts: 6

Number of former editors who ended up in Mexico: 1.5

Times we've been sued: 2

Times we've been threatened with being sued: 21

Total federal grants received by *Briarpatch* between 2010 and 2012 to help publications "overcome market disadvantages": \$26,047

Total federal grants received by Glacier BIG Holdings Company Ltd. (publisher of *Canadian Plastics*, *Oilweek*, and the *Canadian Mining Journal*, among others) in the same period: \$893,202

Number of issues published by our short-lived sister publication, *The Sasquatch*: 8

Estimated number of people who phoned *The Sasquatch* looking for an actual sasquatch: 5

Year that *Briarpatch* got its first computer: 1985

Number of times proofreader Kim Kovacs has saved our ass: ∞

Year in which she stopped us from inadvertently referring to Rick Hillier as the "pubic face of Canada's military": 2010

Year in which *Briarpatch* incorporated the Oxford comma into our style guide: 2012

Number of days required to conclude this debate among staff: 11

Cost of a subscription in 1973: \$2

Number of pages in the first issue and the 40th anniversary issue, respectively: 4, 44

Number of issues cancelled for lack of funds in 40 years: 2

Number of times the magazine has been evicted: 1

Years since staff joined the Retail Wholesale & Department Store Union (RWDSU): 37

Percentage of subscribers who learned about *Briarpatch* through word of mouth: 23.5

Percentage of subscribers who can't remember how they first heard about *Briarpatch* because it's been too long: 26

Percentage of subscribers who never throw out their *Briarpatch* copies: 52

Estimated number of *Briarpatch* copies rotting in people's basements, attics, and bathroom magazine racks: 62,400

Percentage of subscribers who have shaken their fists in silent fury after reading *Briarpatch*, according to our 2007 reader survey: 47



Top Left: Member of the editorial collective Marian Gilmour eyes the copy to see if columns line up, 1978. **Bottom Left:** Fundraising dinner, 1980. **Right:** Moving from the 1409 10th Avenue office to Briarpatch's current location at 2138 McIntyre Street in Regina, 1980. From left to right, Ivan Olynyk, Bev Crossman, Bob Buckingham, Clare Powell.



Briarpatch

SASKATCHEWAN'S
INDEPENDENT
NEWSMAGAZINE





Top Right: Gary Robins, Ken Pawliw, and Edith Mountjoy move the Compugraphic typesetter from the 1618 10th Avenue office, 1978. Top Left: Edith Mountjoy and Donna Burton. Mid Left: The sign that remains out front of Briarpatch's current home in Regina, Huston House. Right: Pam Hanna from Briarpatch's board of directors and Sally McKenzie from the Canadian University Press pick up a copy of Briarpatch from the newsstand, 1977.





Above: Third annual Briarpatch baseball tournament, 1985 Below: Editor Beth Smillie and Jim Hanan at a curling bonspiel fundraiser.



How Briarpatch Got Its Name

By Ken Collier

A welfare rights groups in Saskatoon decided in the fall of 1970 that people should be able to know what welfare regulations meant for them. The Unemployed Citizens' Welfare Improvement Council (UCWIC – pronounced "You Quick") began a pressure program to get special needs allowances for winter clothing, housing repairs, and transportation to attend job interviews and medical appointments, – all of which had previously been grudgingly given or refused altogether.

As a tactic in the greater strategy of organizing people on welfare, we agreed to focus pressure on the director of the Saskatoon regional office of the Department of Social Services. His name was Brierley.

Mr. Brierley was a very disciplined civil servant. He took the view, apparently, that it was not right for civil servants to get involved in controversies with pressure groups, so he declined all public comments on any matter dealing with specific complaints about the department. In doing that, he became the perfect target. We blamed *everything* on Mr. Brierley, as if he were personally accountable for every misdeed of every social worker – in fact, for everything done or not done in the whole department.

After several months of organizing, during which UCWIC swelled to over 300 people, the steering committee decided a newsletter was needed. Of course we named it after the unfortunate Mr. Brierley. *Briarpatch* was born.

The first issue was photocopied in March or April 1971 at the Saskatoon Family Service Bureau (where I was working at the time) on one of the early machines that used rolls of that grey, waxy paper. As a new technology, it was too expensive to continue to photocopy *Briarpatch*, so we switched to Gestetner. No copies of the first edition remain, because the grey photocopy paper disintegrated within a couple of years. Perhaps some readers have copies of the Gestetnered issues, though only three or four of those editions came to print.

In about 1973 or 1974, UCWIC split over some internal political issues, and *Briarpatch* evolved into a more broadly focused newsmagazine covering unemployment, women's and Aboriginal issues, the environment, progressive social policy, agriculture, and rural issues. The official 1973 inauguration of *Briarpatch* as a magazine makes it now 40 years old, but its root beginnings in UCWIC seem to have continuing power and inspiration as a magazine dealing with the issues of common people and the oppressed. ①

Adapted and reprinted from Briarpatch's 20th anniversary issue in 1993.

briarpatch magazine

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

June 27, 2013 at 6:00pm
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Regina, SK
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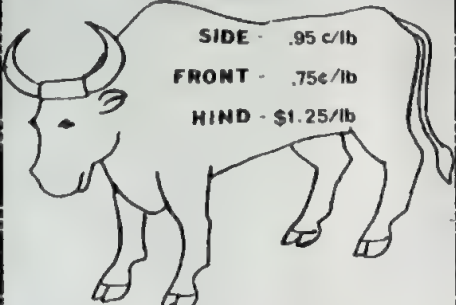
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KITTENS

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Government Inspected
- Grain Fed
- No Additives



Cutting & Wrapping Extra
Will Deliver
The Gordon's - Wapella

September 1976

Dear Briar Patch:

Keep up the good work! Briar Patch is one of the rays of sunshine in the mainly overcast sky of Saskatchewan print media.

B. G. Rumpel
Saskatoon

WE BUY

old scrap tractors, plows, batteries, etc. (no car bodies) by the ton.

CONTACT: Ray Kline

October 19, 1998

We have

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"Play together...not against each other."

Catalog - \$.10 postage

ANNIE HALL

This romantic comedy, in which a New York stand-up comic and gag writer (Woody Allen) wistfully recalls the ups and downs of a bittersweet love affair with an aspiring singer-actress (brilliantly played by Diane Keaton), is director-writer-actor Woody Allen's finest film to date--and that says a lot, given that the "near misses" include "Sleeper", "Love and Death", "Bananas" and "Play it Again, Sam". Quite frankly, it's the best American film released so far this year.

Dear Teri,

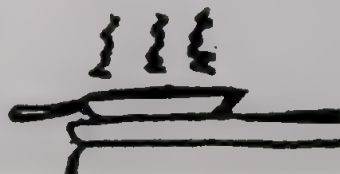
Briarpatch wants to make sure our computers will survive the Year 2000 problem. We are looking for someone to fix any problems we will experience. Since Glenn set up our subscription list program, and figured out a way to let us have subscriptions expire after 1999, we figure he would be an excellent person to solve our computer problems before they happen. I am trying to get in touch with Glenn, to offer him this job. We can afford to pay him for his time.

Can you give us his phone number or have him phone me?
Thanks. I hope everything is well with you.

Sincerely,

George

**THE
BRIAR
PATCH**

**HELPFUL TIPS**

- 1) shop with a grocery list and never when you are tired and hungry or in a hurry.
- 2) if you bake in pyrex pans lower oven temperature by 25 degrees.

AND REMEMBER, NO FOOD IS A BARGAIN

IF YOUR FAMILY WON'T EAT IT.

WE'RE CREATING A NEW UNION!



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The Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) are in the process of building a new union together.

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Members will come from backgrounds as diverse as the Canadian mosaic.

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LIBERATIONANTI-RACIST ORGANIZING, FEMINIST PRAXIS,
AND MOVEMENT BUILDING STRATEGY

CHRIS CRASS

FOREWORD BY ROBERTA DUNBAR GUTZ

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY CHRIS CRASS

"There are several books that have been recommended since the author's first passage."

Towards Collective Liberation
Anti-racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis and
Movement Building StrategyBy Chris Crass
PM Press, 2013

Reviewed by Yutaka Dirks

Chris Crass is a longtime activist originally from California where he was active in San Francisco Food Not Bombs (FNB) and the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. As an educator and organizer with the Catalyst Project for over 10 years, Crass supported anti-racist politics and leadership development in the U.S. left, working to foster and support multiracial alliances. *Towards Collective Liberation* collects several of his essays from the last decade about anti-racist feminist practice and anarchist leadership and intersperses them with material written from his new home in Tennessee.

After a short essay on what anarchism might offer those attempting to enact a visionary left politics, Crass provides a fulsome, critical history of FNB, a group that has introduced thousands of young, mainly white, people into radical politics. He offers an engaging insider's account of the class struggle in San Francisco in the early '90s, as well as a frank discussion of the struggles within FNB around organization and strategy and internal sexism and racism.

Crass sees "collective liberation" – a term borrowed from an essay by bell hooks – as a "vision of what we want and a strategic framework to help us get there." Acknowledging his debt to feminists of colour, he shares honest, personal reflections on challenging male and white supremacy. While he does not

offer a developed analysis of the difference between "anti-oppression" and "collective liberation," he seems to prefer the latter term and critiques the tendency to focus on "what not to do, rather than what to do."

Towards Collective Liberation includes interviews with a variety of activists from organizations that are leading anti-racist efforts in white communities and in majority-white campaigns. Amy Dudley from Oregon's Rural Organizing Project explains the group's success in strengthening anti-racism and queer-liberation politics in primarily white, rural communities, contesting the idea that these

**"Collective liberation" is a
"vision of what we want
and a strategic framework
to help us get there."**

places are a ready-made base for the right. Carla Wallace describes how Kentucky's Fairness Campaign intervened in electoral and policy issues in a relatively conservative, mid-sized city to develop long-term multiracial alliances that were able to mobilize a grassroots base to defend queer rights and fight racist police abuse.

The experiences of these two organizations offer Canadian radicals valuable lessons as they grapple with the reality

that, while Canada is becoming increasingly urban, half of the people in Canada still live outside major urban centres where the right tends to dominate, and, apart from a few large cities, the country is predominantly white.

Also of interest is the work of the Groundwork Collective, which played a leadership role in amplifying a racial justice analysis during the recent uprising in Madison, Wis., something only possible after building bridges with people of colour who were leading ongoing, local racial justice organizing. Groundwork provides a reminder that newly politicized people who are directly experiencing economic oppression want to shrug off their alienation and connect with their humanity. The white anti-racists Crass interviews understand that "struggle is the greatest teacher" and encourage anti-racist activists to show leadership and help develop a movement committed to collective liberation during moments such as the Madison mobilization or the anti-immigrant battles in Arizona.

Crass leaves the reader with eight practical lessons. Among them, he reminds us of the importance of setting concrete and measurable goals and cultivating a "developmental organizing approach that is reflective and supportive of all its members' political and skills development."

Crass understands that "good ideas are not enough," but the short essays he



Whitetail Shooting Gallery

By Annette Lapointe
Anvil Press, 2012

Reviewed by Yutaka Dirks

includes addressing “strategic, liberation organizing praxis” are somewhat disappointing. Written in the early 2000s during the height of the anti-globalization movement, they highlight the importance of critical leadership and an organizing culture that works to build and nurture new leaders and strategic thinking, as exemplified by Ella Baker’s work in the civil rights struggle. However, given the importance of building our movements’ capacity and power, a more in-depth and substantive discussion would be welcome.

**“Good ideas
are not
enough.”**

It takes hard work to create and refine “liberatory processes and practices in the here and now while we fight for the future.” Crass has given white activists and others an excellent resource to continue this work. *Towards Collective Liberation* is a powerful and honest work that underscores the importance of confronting racism and sexism and nurturing the leadership skills of new organizers to reach their full potential as a force that can radically transform society. ⑤

Whitetail Shooting Gallery follows cousins and neighbours Jennifer and Jason as they grow up in the stark landscape of the Bear Hills near Saskatoon. The two are close as children, but their friendship slowly unravels as they move into adolescence. The growing uneasiness between the pair erupts into violence when Jason wounds Jennifer and her horse in a shooting. She survives, but whether the shooting was accidental or motivated by anger or fear is never made clear.

As the cousins struggle with the repercussions of this event, they also have to contend with the teenage trials of exploring their own sexual identities. Jennifer eventually finds ecstasy in the arms of her friend Donna, the goth daughter of an evangelistic preacher. Jason, too, is queer. During the chaotic night of a hockey hazing ritual, which begins as a game of hunting one another in the dark, Jason has sex with a teammate.

Whitetail Shooting Gallery contains frequent metaphorical allusions to predators, often when describing the relationships between characters. A disquieting mood pervades the novel, keeping tensions at an interminable simmer. Yet instances of

violence, which are numerous, are often incidental; rarely are they acts of cruelty motivated by malicious intent. Lapointe’s characters develop scars, becoming hard in the process rather than fearful: “They might hurt all over, but that’s not an emergency; it’s just the state of them.”

As Jason and Jennifer move into their 30s, the world around them changes, but they continue to drift with little in the way of revelatory insight. The shooting is revisited in a final, violent confrontation between the two, but questions of motive and circumstance continue to linger. There is no redemption or closure in the final pages, atypical for a coming-of-age narrative. One can still close the book satisfied, largely due to the strength of Lapointe’s graceful prose and the novel’s haunting, melancholic atmosphere.

“In the good old days, children like you were left to perish on windswept crags,” the young Jennifer writes on the walls of her friend Gina’s bedroom, unsure “whether it’s aimed at Jason or her, or some other kid she’s never met.” *Whitetail Shooting Gallery* offers a piercing glance at children who manage to survive as they stumble, unflinching, through this dangerous world. ⑤

QUOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND



The scourge of smarts

"Intelligent people do well in almost every sphere of modern life, except for the most important things, like how to find a mate, how to raise a child, how to make friends. Intelligence does not confer any advantage for solving all the evolutionarily familiar problems that our ancestors encountered.

SATOSHI KANAZAWA

"We do know that no one gets wise enough to really understand the heart of another, though it is the task of our life to try."

LOUISE ERDRICH

The freedom of encumbrance

"The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day."

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

"Perhaps encumbering ourselves with each other, and seeing beauty in that process, might be precisely the end that we need to accomplish."

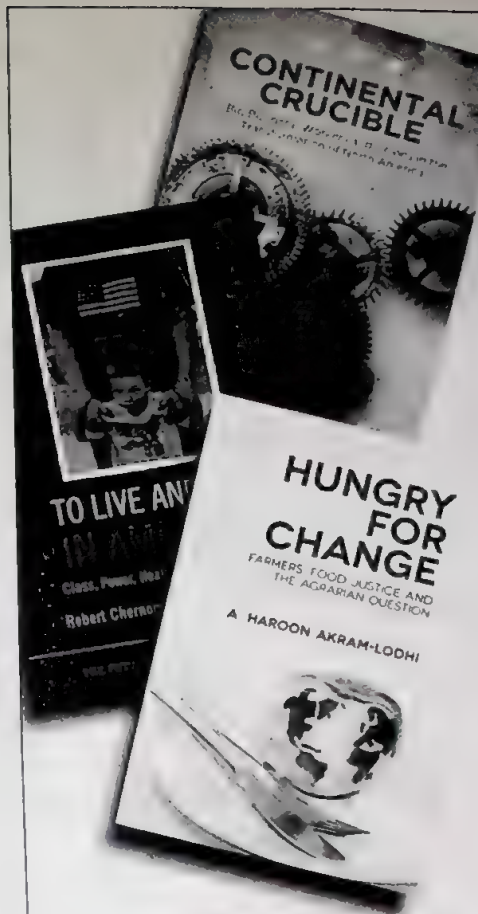
CYNTHIA DEWI OKA

This is the land of equal opportunity.

If you refuse to inherit millions and invest it in profitable ventures, that's your own fault.



MINIMUM SECURITY
by Stephanie McMillan



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Robert Chernomas & Ian Hudson

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A must-read for all who embrace the goals for fairness shared by the 99 percent.

— Paul Moist, National President, CUPE

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Richard Roman & Edur Velasco Arregui,

Preface by Mel Watkins

9781552665473 \$19.95

This insightful, revealing, and passionate book is a must read for workers and union activists all over the world in their efforts to develop strategies to overcome neoliberalism. — Alejandro Alvarez, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE Farmers, Food Justice and the Agrarian Question

A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi

9781552665466 \$24.95

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☐ We occasionally exchange mailing lists with like-minded organizations as a way of reaching new subscribers. If you'd prefer not to receive such mailings, please check here.

SUSTAINER PROFILE #20:

Marcel Petit



Marcel Petit is a Saskatoon-based filmmaker, photographer, community activist, and chocolate lover. He's passionate about supporting youth who are facing the same systematic poverty and racism that he experienced in his youth. Briarpatch feels honoured to have claimed a comfortable corner in his heart alongside Glee, Judy Garland, and Chris Hedges.

Why do you make films?

I come from dysfunction and addiction, so a lot of my movies deal with that. I'm trying to give people a chance to use their voice. As a brown person in Saskatchewan, it took me a long time to realize that I have every right to become a filmmaker and that I shouldn't be doing cocaine and drinking. I'm not trying to be a hero; I'm trying to give something back. As a filmmaker, I can give back by telling stories.

What do you do for fun?

I ride bikes. I read. I make Lego Star Wars movies and invite friends over to play the voices. I watch wrestling every Monday. I hate TV, but this year I got sucked into *The Voice* and watched the entire season.

What's your favourite book?

Anything by Noam Chomsky or Chris Hedges, especially *Empire of Illusion*. I love thinking.

What do you see as the most important issue facing Canadians?

Our water, uranium mining, and that pipeline – everything to do with oil and the tarsands. We have to ask ourselves what we're leaving for our grandkids and their grandkids.

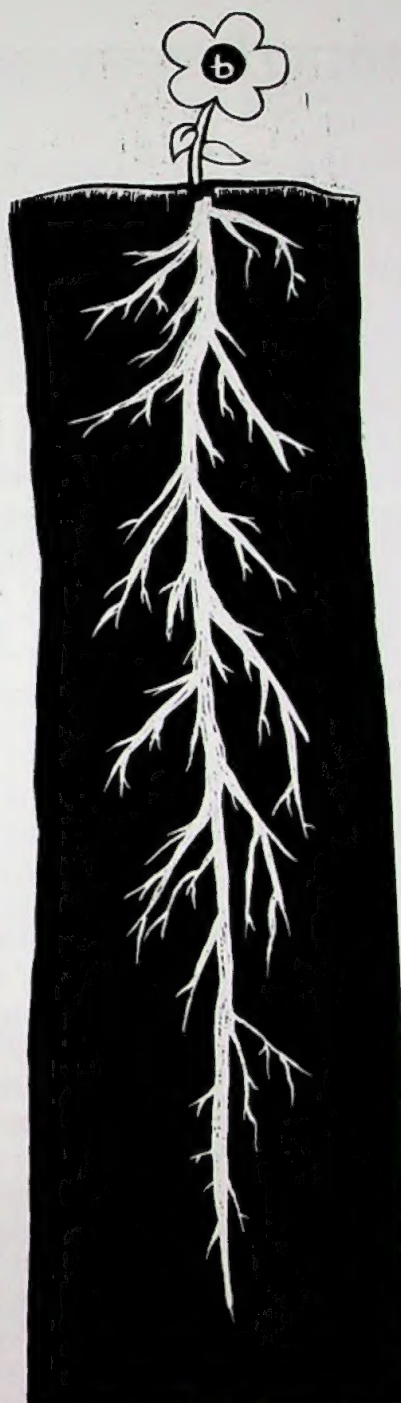
How would you describe *Briarpatch* to a friend?

Way better than *Maclean's*. It's informative and honest.

The automatic monthly donations of the following Sustainers provide *Briarpatch* with a welcome source of stable, ongoing revenue.

Sustainers receive an automatically renewing subscription, printed thanks in every issue of *Briarpatch*, a special annual newsletter produced exclusively for Sustainers and a permanent vacation from receiving our renewal notices and biannual donor appeals.

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P. Adamson
MONTREAL, QC

Ingrid Alesich
REGINA, SK

Don Anderson
REGINA, SK

Anonymous
REGINA, SK

David Askew
VANCOUVER, BC

Cara Banks
REGINA, SK

Valerie G. Barnes-Connell
LA RONGE, SK

Frank & Liz Barningham
DURHAM, ON

Carol Bell
SYLVAN LAKE, AB

Jennie Bell
OTTAWA, ON

Pat Bell
REGINA, SK

Obee Benjamin
DARTMOUTH, NS

Anne Bennett
PIERREFONDS, QC

Wayne Bennett
ST. ALBERT, AB

Alan Besecker
EDMONTON, AB

Trevor Berry
CAMPBELL RIVER, BC

D. & A. Beveridge
REGINA, SK

Michelle Beveridge
SASKATOON, SK

Al Birchard
VERWOOD, SK

Dawn Birchard
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Ken Bird
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Randy Bodnaryk
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Lara Bonokoski
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Barbara Byers
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Justice, Global & Ecumenical Relations Unit, United Church of Canada
TORONTO, ON

Sask Joint Board - RWDSU
REGINA, SK

Calling all our superheroes

Supporting Indigenous kids to succeed in the Canadian education system while reviving Indigenous pedagogies requires nothing short of superhuman effort.

By Chelsea Vowel



I am often conflicted as an educator. As a Native woman, I consider the current system of education in Canada to be inherently colonial, and I hate my role in perpetuating it.

Many Native people have negative feelings toward the education system, and for good reason. It was one of the main tools of what I call annihilationist policies toward us. (I think the term “assimilationist” is too mild for what was intended.) It continues to be a place where we are forgotten, or actively belittled, as peoples. But the negativity also comes from an awareness that Indigenous ways of knowing are ignored completely by the educational system. We can have all the “Aboriginal content” you can shake a stick at, but ultimately, Indigenous peoples do not pass on our wisdom in this way.

As a Native mother, I want my children to have an Indigenous education. But an Indigenous education is not valued in Canadian society. If I focus all my energy on providing my children with as much of an Indigenous education as possible, I will still have to ensure they succeed in Canadian schools or I will be setting them up for failure. And failure for us is not being unable to be a doctor or an astronaut. It means marginalization, poverty, suicide, death. I cannot allow that to happen.

The reality of our situation is that unless we succeed in Canadian schools, we will never be able to revive Indigenous education. We will never have the capacity to bring back into being a fundamentally different way of learning about the world. We have already been losing pieces, and eventually there will be nothing more to lose.

What is required is nothing short of superhuman effort. Not only do we have to excel in a foreign system of education, we must do so without sacrificing ourselves, without succumbing to annihilation. At the same time, we must root ourselves in traditional pedagogy. We have to do it all.

Right now, many of our communities are in conflict. They want Indigenous education, not “education for Indigenous peoples,” which is merely Canadian education with cut-and-pasted medicine wheels or four direction teachings. We often don’t buy into Canadian schools, even when they’re run by the local band. Knowing that we are not going to be validated, or celebrated,

or sometimes even discussed at all, means that we have little incentive. Sometimes we believe that lack of success in Canadian systems means we are more Indigenous, less colonized. We want the system to fail because maybe then it will finally be understood that the system has been failing us all along.

We don’t have the capacity yet to create our own educational systems in a way that allows us to send our children out into the world prepared for a reality that places European values above all others. My eldest daughter is almost 11. She can’t wait for that capacity to be developed down the road. But she’s got to do her best with what exists now.

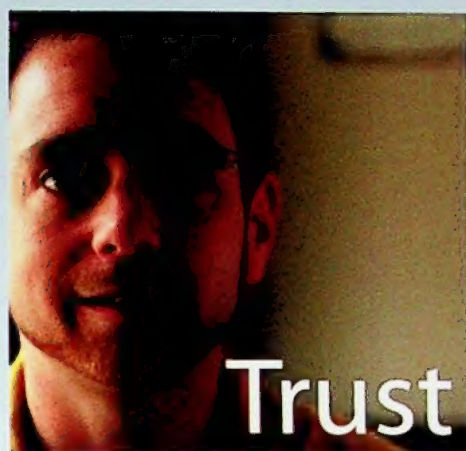
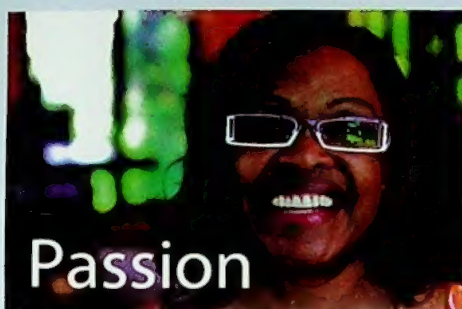
Idle No More is calling on its superheroes. Rather than waiting for some magical time when Canadians recognize that our ways of knowing are valuable, as though suddenly the “bush PhDs” among us will finally get noticed, we need to first ensure that we value those ways of knowing ourselves. That means doing the difficult work of reclaiming Indigenous pedagogies.

We all have an important role to play. Whether we are setting up language nests in our living rooms or taking kids and parents out on the land, we need to be doing more of it. We must all become students of our own cultures and dedicate ourselves to learning for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

At the same time, we should be supporting our children to excel in the Canadian system. It isn’t fair and it isn’t right, but it needs doing. Our peoples have shown themselves to be masters at integrating new technologies and adapting to new situations without losing their core values. Shifting our expectations so that we create a support system for our children to succeed in Canadian schools *and* in traditional settings is how we are going to build this capacity. We need to buy in, while remembering that Canadian education is nothing more than a means to an end.

So let us kick out the substandard teachers and the administrators who do not believe in our kids. Let us bring the parents and the whole community into the classroom. Let us expect more of our kids. Let us expect more of ourselves. Let us expect superhuman effort, knowing we can absolutely rise to the occasion but that we cannot do it alone. We cannot let our hopes for the future blind us to the work we have to do right now. ❧

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